

## Not All Bad

One of my greatest fears in life, even as a child, was that I may one day get cancer. It would often consume my thoughts. I knew no-one personally that had had cancer, so there really was no explanation for this fear. I believe that the Lord was preparing me for what was to come.

It was around 2000 - I had been concerned with a lump in my breast for some time. As I was under 40, my doctor at the time believed it was unlikely that I had breast cancer and did not send me for a mammogram. In her opinion it was just hormonal (lumpy breasts). Over a period of two years I saw other doctors because I was starting to display symptoms of tiredness, no energy, and feeling generally unwell. My symptoms were dismissed as stress, depression, low iron etc. I was even called a hypochondriac (other words used to describe this) by one particular doctor because I kept going back due to my health getting worse rather than better. Eventually, believing I have had all the tests that the doctors were going to give me, I stopped going.

Around two years later, in April 2002, the lump in my breast was visible to my own eye and I went back again to the original doctor who this time ordered a mammogram, although I was still under 40 (38). I knew what the result would be and even before opening the envelope - yes, the one that says "for medical practitioner only", I went into shock. I went to a friend's place and asked her to open it for me. Yes, I had cancer. She came back to the doctor with me. My greatest fear was now staring me in the face. My natural reaction was to go into shock and to wonder why God would allow me to go through cancer when I had prayed against it for so many years. My faith took a bit of a nose dive.

I was given an appointment for the following day with a specialist at the Princess Alexandra Hospital. I brought my friend along with me and we both asked a lot of questions. After the specialist had given me an examination and felt the size of my tumor, I asked him, how long did he think I would live? He thought he was giving me hope when he said that he has known people in my condition to still have their files still opened after five years. I quickly did the sums – my youngest child was only eight, so that would make him only thirteen at best. The fear again was consuming me. Then started my roller-coaster ride over the next five years.

Due to the size of my tumours it was necessary for me to have a mastectomy, chemotherapy and radium – a term known as "slash, poison and burn".

I was in my hospital bed after surgery, and bit by bit I would receive details of my tumor ie it's size, type of cancer, if it had spread to my lymph nodes and how many. Well the news couldn't have been worse on all accounts. I had two tumors which combined measured 8cm (2cm was considered bad enough to need chemo); I had HER2 breast cancer which is one of the most aggressive breast cancers there is; nearly all of the lymph nodes that were removed were cancerous (12/14). All of these factors determine the stage of cancer and your chances of survival. I was now at stage III (there are four stages in breast cancer). The statistics were very grim. I had no hope of living a full life if I was to listen and rely solely on the medical world. It was about at that time that I decided that my only hope lie in the Lord (I referred to Him over this time as Emmanuel [God is with me]).

I then started on my "treatment" road. Apart from chemotherapy and radium, I was offered a clinical trial. This trial was only offered to 3000 people world wide. There are three phases on the trial and only two had the new drug Herceptin that looked very promising in helping to extend the

lives of those with HER2 breast cancer. Your name goes into a computer and, a bit like a lottery you get chosen randomly and allocated to a particular phase of the trial. People were praying that I would get the phase that had the Herceptin. I had to wait one to two weeks to find out, but it was worth the wait when I got my first bit of good news for a long time. I was on the phase with Herceptin.

This strengthened my faith. I bucked myself up and decided then and there, that I was going to beat this thing. My God is walking this journey with me. He says in His word that He will be a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless. There are numerous scriptures that speak of God's instructions to people to look after the fatherless and the widows but I will name just two – Psalms 68:5 and Psalms 146:9. I saw myself as both of these. My husband had left me a couple of years prior to my diagnosis after eighteen years of marriage, and my earthly father has never been a father to me (another story). I decided to take the Lords word literally and believed totally that he was with me throughout my whole journey. Page 2 of 3

To continually encourage me and build my faith, the Lord would send me encouragement through His earthly angles. I would receive cards, letters, flowers, music, videos, meals, help cleaning my house, help with my yard, working bees for various things where the youth from my church would devote their time to help me. There is just too much to list here, but please, if you don't get anything else from my testimony, I would like to say to whoever is reading this, do not underestimate the power or encouragement! It was this encouragement that kept me going when I felt it was all too much. Also, throughout my ordeal, there were many people praying for me. A prayer meeting was held at church for me and through this and also from other avenues, God gave me many words - words to give me "hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

He also gave me prophecies that are not yet fulfilled. Therefore, if He has these plans for my life then He needs me around to fulfill those plans right? I held onto each and every word and piece of encouragement that I received. I filled a scrap book and more with them and still look over that scrap book now when I need a bit of lifting up.

In about June 2003 I had finished all of my treatment and could start on my road back to recovery. It would take me almost two years before I started to really feel "half normal" again. My energy levels were rising and I could do more and more each day. I was praising God for my victory.

During this period I was asking the Lord what He wanted me to learn from this. There were many things ie feeling the love around me from so many sources - something I lacked throughout my life and was in desperate need of; realizing that people did actually care about me etc. However, I believe that the main thing the Lord wanted me to learn from my ordeal was that I needed to make time to be with Him. My life prior to my diagnosis was so hectic and apart from going to church and "doing the right things", I didn't actually take the time out to grow to know the Lord and to establish a relationship with Him. By being sick for so long, I was now forced to slow down. I had plenty of time on my hands now and no more excuses. I think I learned this lesson a little too late into my journey to start acting on what I believed the Lord was saying to me. The better I felt, the more I would start back into my normal existence of filling my days up and still not giving the Lord enough of my time – although I did spend a little more time with Him than before and thought that this was better than nothing. I don't think the Lord thought it was enough though.

It was in February 2005, that it struck again. I was diagnosed with metastasis to the brain (two tumors). I was now in stage IV of cancer. Well my faith did a nose dive again. I was in this big black hole with slippery sides that I just couldn't get out of. Back to the hospital, more surgery (brain surgery this time), full brain radiation etc. The statistics again were very grim. A very small percentage of those that have brain metastases from breast cancer are still alive two years later, with most occurrences happening within the first year.

I asked the Lord "why again"? Again I believe that He was telling me that He wants more of my time. The fact that my cancer returned to my brain was also significant to me. The brain is for thinking and learning and I realised that I needed to focus my thinking on the things of God more fully and learn more about Him.

I became very repented while lying in my hospital bed after surgery. Again I turned to Him as my only hope. I would not accept statistics, or listen to oncologists on how long they thought I had left. God has numbered my days. He is Lord of all things, and that includes the medical profession (Romans 10:12). His Word says so and I took Him at His Word. If He wanted me around until I was 100 then I would be here regardless of what the medical professional believed.

I studied His word from then on, prayed and talked to Him on a regular basis; read many Christian books that would help me to grow closer to the Lord. I grew closer to Him than ever before. This in turn also strengthened my faith. God gave me a gift of faith many years ago – He obviously knew that I would need that faith to get me through my journey with cancer.

Well it is now December 2007, two and a half years since my brain tumor diagnosis, and guess what - I am still here! I recently had a full body scan (including my brain) and a full bone scan. I was concerned about a couple of things, but when I felt Gods peace throughout this process, I was not surprised to find out that I am cancer free.

Having these scans can be very stressful - in particular the bone scan as it comes very close to your face and your head. Having had this scan before, I knew what to expect and asked a couple of people to pray for me in this regard. Well instead of being fearful as I jumped up onto the table for my scan, I was totally at peace. Better still when the scan is happening, they play soft music for you to help you to relax – well I was dancing with my feet to the music!

After hearing my results, I had a strong believe and peace that everything was now all over. There would be no more cancer. This was confirmed to me, when a couple of nights later, a friend sent me a text message. The message was taken from the scripture Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is with you,... He will rejoice over you with singing". This, to me, was the Lord telling me that it's over and that He is rejoicing with me over this fact.

I believe my journey with cancer is over forever. All the glory for this goes to the Lord. During my journey, I sometimes wondered why God would allow me to walk through cancer. Why did He not stop it from happening or at least heal me miraculously. When I look back now and reflect, there are many reasons. While He didn't give me this terrible disease, He allowed me to go through it. He gave me the gift of faith to endure all I had to endure. He gave me all the strength I needed to get me through. He gave me comfort, love, encouragement, hope, a father, a husband, a friend, a closer relationship with Him, and much, much, more.

God has our days numbered, and has our lives mapped out, and no diagnosis, regardless of how hopeless it seems, is going to stop that because He is Lord of all things - including cancer (Romans 10:12 ). If we can learn to embed that into our mind and heart and truly believe it then we will learn to trust Him in all things. We will allow Him to lead us along the path He has paved for us. He never left me throughout my journey with cancer. He was my Emmanuel.

While it is easy to blame God for the things that go wrong in our lives He is not to blame, but sometimes He allows us to travel uncomfortable roads and uses this to teach us along the way. It could be to strengthen our faith, to teach us patience, to get His attention, to help others who are going through similar things.

I know that apart from that I have already spoken of, God has a plan for my life (Jeremiah 29:11). Already He has used me to help others going through cancer. I don't go looking for them, they come to me. A coincidence – I don't think so.

Believe in the Lord and trust Him with all your heart. He will never leave you nor forsake you. This is His promise – you just have to believe it.

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### **Not All Bad...**

April '02 I was given bad news,  
The 'C' word they said that I had  
My whole world came crashing down  
With this news that was ever so bad

I began my journey through tests and the like  
Operations one, two, three  
The news just kept getting worse every time  
Why did it have to be me

My son needs me, I argued with God  
He's only eight you know  
Just let me live a little longer  
'til he's old enough to know

The chemo started, the sickness came  
The baldness came as well  
It got worse with every treatment  
I was in a living hell

They gave me a break of a few weeks  
Before the radium came to burn me  
Tatoos on the skin and dignity gone  
But the end I was starting to see

Only six more months, that's all I had  
On a yearly clinical trial  
With xrays and heart tests along the way  
But it's only for a little while

The sickness was starting to subside  
The energy had slowly returned  
I could even see some hair on my head  
There was so much that I had learned

Cancer's not the curse you'd think it would be  
With it came so much good  
People showed me how much they cared  
More than I thought they would

You see God knew that I felt unloved and that nobody seemed to care  
So He allowed me to travel along this road  
So I could see that the love was there

It may seem silly but I feel kind of privileged  
To be chosen to see what it's like  
To go through the journey I've been on  
And come out the other side

**Carmel**